

# Focus on: Study of Plastic Packaging in Washington



## For More Information

Find links to the five Cascadia reports and Ecology's report to the legislature:

<https://ecology.wa.gov/Waste-Toxics/Reducing-recycling-waste/Plastics-study>

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## Special accommodations

To request ADA accommodations, including materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at 360-407-6381 or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>.

People with impaired hearing may call Washington Relay Service at 711. People with a speech disability may call TTY at 877-833-6341.

## Study of plastic packaging in Washington

Residents of Washington are concerned about plastic in our environment. As we work to develop solutions, we first need to measure the extent of the problem. A 2019 law (Chapter 70A.520 RCW) directed the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) to hire an independent contractor to study plastic packaging in Washington. Ecology hired Cascadia Consulting (Cascadia) as the independent contractor.

That law set the following three goals for January 2025 – that plastic packaging:

- Be 100% recyclable, reusable, or compostable
- Contain 20% postconsumer recycled content
- Be reduced when possible, optimizing the use to meet the need.

## Cascadia's Plastic Packaging Reports

Cascadia submitted five plastic packaging reports to Ecology:

**Stakeholder Consultations** describes the process followed to consult with packaging and packaged goods producers, solid waste management providers, and other stakeholders.

**Plastic Packaging in Washington Assessing Use, Disposal, and Management** explains plastic packaging waste generation, management, and disposal in Washington State. This report also details infrastructure needed to meet the 2025 goals.

**Recycled Content Use in Washington** summarizes plastic manufacturing with recycled content in Washington.

**Successful Plastic Packaging Management Programs and Innovations** identifies management programs, policies, and technological innovations from around the world that help reduce, reuse, recycle, or compost plastic packaging.

**Recommendations for Managing Plastic Packaging Waste in Washington** details ten policy recommendations to meet the goals set in the law.

# Solid Waste Management

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## Cascadia's Recommendations

Cascadia submitted ten policy recommendations to Ecology. Cascadia based their recommendations on the work detailed in the studies listed above. Their recommendations are based on known best practices that rely on sustainable funding.

Cascadia separated the ten recommendations into four categories:

### Three primary recommendations that require legislative action.

1. Extended Producer Responsibility Policy Framework for All Consumer Packaging and Paper
2. Deposit Return System for All Beverage Containers
3. Recycled Content Requirements for All Plastic Packaging

### Two legislative interim policy options that are supplemental to the primary recommendations.

1. Producer Registry and Packaging Reporting
2. Recycled Content Requirements for Plastic Beverage Containers

### Three legislative policy actions that advance the goals in ways that complement the primary recommendations.

1. Recycled Content Requirements for Trash Bags
2. Ban on Problematic and Unnecessary Plastic Packaging
3. The Standard for Customer Opt-in for Foodservice Packaging and Accessories

### Two recommended agency activities that do not require legislative action.

1. Strengthen Data Collection on Final Destinations of Materials Sent for Reprocessing
2. Support Development and Adoption of Reusable Packaging Systems

## Ecology's Next Steps

Ecology did not propose legislative action for the 2021 session. The recommendations in the Cascadia report were completed too late in the year for the agency to propose legislation. In December 2020, Ecology submitted a report to the legislature summarizing Cascadia's research and recommendations:

- **Ecology publication 20-07-028: Evaluation, Assessment, and Recommendations for the Responsible Management of Plastic Packaging in Washington:** As resources allow, Ecology will implement the Cascadia recommendations that do not require legislative action.
- **Strengthen Data Collection on Final Destinations of Materials Sent for Reprocessing:** use Ecology's existing authority under Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 173-350-210 to request additional information from recycling facilities.
- **Support Development and Adoption of Reusable Packaging Systems:** support and prioritize projects that advance or adopt safe, scalable transitions from single-use plastic and other packaging to use of reusable packaging.

In 2021, Ecology will:

- Wait for additional direction from the legislature.
- Consult with stakeholders, including the packaging industry, about the recommendations.
- Consider the need for future legislative proposals